

Speakers: One Act Radio Plays). The theme of these radio plays focuses on pertinent social issues. An extract from P.T. Mtuze's *Ungakhe uxelele mntu* (Do Not Tell Anybody) (1990), a collection of short stories, exposes the pain and suffering that was experienced by South Africans who opposed the vicious Apartheid system.

Izwi labantu is reader-friendly. Brief explanatory annotations precede each text. The notes locate the text within its context in terms of time and space, thereby enhancing the reader's conceptualisation. An additional bonus for the reader is the concise and relevant bibliography at the end of the book. The bibliography introduces the reader to some primary and secondary source material that illuminates the topics addressed in the anthology.

Izwi labantu has been published at a significant historical conjuncture, when the previously marginalised African Culture is struggling for its renaissance. The book will, therefore, be a source of inspiration and for research to both the present generation of cultural workers and to posterity. It is an invaluable reference work for anyone who contemplates studying the history and development of Xhosa literature.

You Can't Escape the Past

*Rope of Sand: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom
in the Nineteenth Century*

by John Laband

Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 1995, 517pp.

ISBN 1 86842 023 X

Reviewed by Stephen Leech

Department of History

University of Durban-Westville

Rope of Sand, as the subtitle aptly describes it, is the story of the development of the Zulu kingdom in the early nineteenth century and its subsequent decline. These two events are linked by the Anglo-Zulu War of 1879. This conflict, to all intents and purposes another British colonial campaign of the nineteenth century, remains, together with the Zulu themselves, a source of interest and debate more than a century later. In 1995 for example the Anglo-Zulu War battlefields were visited by David Bromhead, Colonel of the Royal Regiment of Wales. Part of this regiment was originally the 24th Regiment of

Foot, one of the main British units during the War and the Zulu opponents at the battles of Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift. Bromhead was in South Africa to *inter alia* participate in the annual commemoration parade at Rorke's Drift and commented that:

These events (Isandlwana and Rorke's Drift) are immensely important to us. The army being what it is, we have to attract people. So we do harp on our successes, and failures, and our regimental history The tie between Zululand and the Royal Regiment of Wales is also an important one for us. There is great interest in the UK and an enormous interest in the United States. I cannot tell you how many people ask me to sign books on the subject¹.

Another significant comment came from the author of a recent publication about the War. After having seen only one chapter and a synopsis, the British publishers Greenhill Books, offered Ron Lock a contract for his *Blood on the Painted Mountain*². Lock commented in an interview:

I suppose I wrote it for myself, but there is still such an interest in the Anglo-Zulu War that the publishers obviously think they can make money out of it³.

Thus there remains a significant market for books on this subject. While publications and comment about it, have appeared since the end of the war, the present interest in it really began in the 1960s. The publication of Donald Morris's *The Washing of the Spears*⁴, together with the release of the 1964 film *Zulu*, created enormous interest and led to the release of a growing number of histories of the War and its battles⁵. The majority of these were 'popular' publications, concerned firstly with the activities of the British during the war and secondly the better known of the battles, namely Isandlwana, Rorke's Drift and Ulundi. These books were concerned with a plot, which while historically accurate, nevertheless involved the heroes (the British) being defeated initially (Isandlwana), redeeming themselves soon after (Rorke's Drift) and finally defeating the dangerous foe (Ulundi). The Zulu, as the enemy, were 'Frankenstein's monster' (Furneaux 1963:15)⁶,

¹ 'Salute to Uncle Gunnie', interview in the *Sunday Tribune* 22 January 1995.

² *Blood on Painted Mountain* by R. Lock (1995).

³ 'Fruits of a Childhood Dream', interview in the *Sunday Tribune* 16 July 1995.

⁴ See D. Morris's, (1966) *The Washing of the Spears* and published by Jonathan Cape.

⁵ Examples are *The Zulu War* by D. Clammer (1973), *The Zulu War* by A. Lloyd (1973) and *Rorke's Drift: A Victorian Epic* by M. Glover (1975).

⁶ See R. Furneaux's (1963) *The Zulu War: Isandlwana & Rorke's Drift* and published by Weidenfield & Nicolson.

only mentioned when necessary. This was usually to provide the 'supporting cast' for the British role. One work for example devoted 57 lines to describe Zulu movements and activities between July 1878 and 20 January 1879. By contrast, 39 pages covered British movements and preparations in considerable detail. Zulu tactical movements were mentioned only as they influence British activities (see Clammer 1973:29-69)⁷.

This sort of 'popular' history led to a reaction from academic historians. There was a call to go beyond militarism and examine the wider political, social and economic issues at stake. The battle of Ulundi it was argued, was not the end for the Zulu kingdom. Rather it was promoted as a decisive victory to *inter alia* serve as an example of British power over colonial peoples. The War emerged not as a glorious adventure of cinematic proportions but rather as the beginning of a process of social and economic manipulation. More recently, there have been calls to accept that the status of the Zulu kingdom needed to be 'scaled down'. In other words its role in Southern African history needed to be reassessed and exaggeration of its power avoided.

Thus the title *Rope of Sand: The Rise and Fall of the Zulu Kingdom in the Nineteenth Century* seems to be at odds with these historiographical trends. Indeed it bears a close resemblance to the full title of Morris's book—*The Washing of the Spears: The Rise and Fall of the Great Zulu Nation*. The similarities extend beyond the titles. Both books are concerned with the same period, the nineteenth century, both discuss military history and both deal with the political and social aspects of the Zulu kingdom.

Rope of Sand is however the work of an academic historian who has given respectability to the military history of the Zulu people. Laband has written widely on the war⁸ and this latest work is a synthesis of his research to date. It represents a reappraisal of the Zulu kingdom from a military perspective, or rather a 'war and societies' paradigm. This political and military history approaches nineteenth century Zulu society in terms of the internal and external tensions it faced during the nineteenth century and ultimately how it coped or failed to cope with these.

From the 1830s, the Zulu began to face increasing pressure from the English settlers at Port Natal, from missionaries and the Trekker parties

⁷ See D. Clammer's (1973) *The Zulu War* and published by Purnell & Sons.

⁸ See the articles in *Reality* January 1979, M. de Haas in the *Daily News* 12 May 1992 and J. Wright in the *Natal Witness* 6 April 1992.

⁹ See for example *Field Guide to the War in Zululand and the Defence of Natal* by J. Laband & P. Thompson (1979, 1983, 1987), *The Battle of Ulundi* (1988) and *Kingdom in Crisis: The Zulu Response to the British Invasion of 1879* (1992) by J. Laband and *Isandlwana* by J. Laband and J. Matthews (1992).

moving into Natal (these issues are dealt with in Part II of the book). Militarily, the Zulu were at a distinct disadvantage in terms of firepower. Firearms were utilised by them, although only as ancillary weapons and more usually as an expression of the king's power (p. 182). Consequently the Zulu kings, particularly after the Battle of Ncome/Blood River (pp. 100-105), tended to pursue a diplomatic policy towards the British and Trekkers. Cetshwayo attempted to do this before 1879 but by then certain British officials were determined to provoke war (pp. 193-194).

Laband also discusses the often-ignored internal turmoil within the political structure of the kingdom. Much of this was related to the problems Cetshwayo faced with overly ambitious chiefs. A number desired autonomy, while still others attempted to safeguard their positions by co-operating with the British before and during the war (see for example p. 339). The author deals with these issues, explaining their motivations for committing these apparent acts of treachery.

Another aspect of this internal tension was the difficulties Cetshwayo had in controlling the younger members of his kingdom (see for example pp. 178-179). The eagerness of the latter to confront the British led to a tendency to disregard orders, thereby imperilling Zulu strategy (see for example p. 271).

Included in *Rope of Sand* is an examination of various Zulu rituals. One is the greatly misunderstood ritual purification that followed a battle. Believing that killing someone resulted in 'pollution' by *umnyama*—an evil force—Zulus returning from battle were required to be purified before being admitted back into society. Laband details this ritual in a manner devoid of ethnographic sensationalism (see p. 34).

In addition, the author also does not shy away from including Zulu atrocities during the Anglo-Zulu War (pp. 227-228) but balances these with a description of those committed by troops on the British side (pp. 320-321).

It is this point that is the essence of the book. An attempt to create a balance of perspectives separates it from the 'popular' histories mentioned above. By utilising sources such as the *James Stuart Archive*, *A Zulu King Speaks*¹⁰ and eye-witness accounts of the war (see Laband's 'Notes' and 'Select Bibliography' for details of these), Laband attempts to provide a dual perspective missing in so many previous accounts. Various issues, which previously were sources of sensational interest, are discussed at length, alongside the political and military machinations of the British. Significantly

¹⁰ *A Zulu King Speaks: Statements made by Cetshwayo kaMpende on the History and Customs of his People* edited by C. de B. Webb & J. Wright (1978) and *The James Stuart Archive of Recorded Oral Evidence Relating to the History of the Zulu and Neighbouring People I-IV* edited and translated by C. de B. Webb & J. Wright (1976, 1979, 1982, 1986).

the author also uses the Zulu kings' *izibongi* or praises to describe them and their activities (see for example pp. 57-58). These are very useful and enlightening, offering a Zulu view of these individuals.

There is very obviously an attempt to create an integrated history. It does not represent a departure from his previous work but it is an attempt to make history 'accessible' to a wider audience—a factor which Laband feels is one of the tasks of a historian¹¹.

This desire to make scholarly history 'accessible' to a more 'popular' market has gained much attention. In KwaZulu-Natal the dynamic political situation and the need to explain and contextualise it, have meant a steady publication and re-publication of historical texts¹². Laband firmly situates *Rope of Sand* within this particular discourse, considering that it is essential to understand nineteenth century Zulu history to comprehend contemporary events in KwaZulu-Natal (p. ix). In Laband's opinion, the battle of Ulundi was a decisive engagement (p. 303). It is such nineteenth century conflict and tension that have led to a heightened sense of Zulu national consciousness and pride in the twentieth century. The Zulu Royal House provides the link between these two periods (pp. 439-440). This is at least one argument for comprehending events in the region today, as the heightened consciousness and the Royal House have played and are playing a central role in KwaZulu-Natal politics.

Making history 'accessible' does however have its problems. It often requires a simplification of complex issues and thus a number of historiographical issues are avoided. This is perhaps unfortunate, since general readers may never come into full contact with the complexities of South African history and the writing thereof. An illustration of this is the use of Zulu oral testimony as available in the *James Stuart Archive, A Zulu King Speaks*. The problems of colonial influence on such testimony are, of course, paramount issues and have raised enormous historiographical problems. Debate over whether it is a reliable source of information or whether it has been sullied by the colonial authorities who collected it, has resulted in much controversy among historians¹³. In addition, the kings' praises are of course

¹¹ 'You can't Escape the Past', interview in the *Sunday Tribune* 5 November 1995.

¹² Examples include *To Bind the Nation* by N. Cope (1993), *The Destruction of the Zulu Kingdom* by J. Guy (1994) & *Shaka's Children: A History of the Zulu People* by S. Taylor (1994).

¹³ For differing views see *inter alia* C. Hamilton's (1993) *Authoring Shaka: Models, Metaphors and Historiography*, Unpublished Ph.D., The Johns Hopkins University (pp. 63-78) and 'A Tainted Well. The Objectives, Historical Fantasies, and Working-Methods of James Stuart, with Counter-Argument' by J. Cobbing in the *Journal of Natal and Zulu History* XI (1988).

also oral in origin and thus may not have been recorded accurately or may express imagery far beyond their superficial nature. These matters are not addressed by Laband in the book and indeed he has unquestioningly made use of such sources. Thus the reader not familiar with the debates may come to regard them as unconditionally reliable.

The inclusion of such issues need not be problematic, however. Laband does manage to include perspectives of the *Mfecane*—the early nineteenth century changes or upheavals in Southern Africa—for example. Assessments of this issue have differed greatly and Laband considers all of these (pp. 13-16).

Rope of Sand also tends to focus on 'great men' and 'great events' and thus the Zulu kingdom appears remarkable, never ordinary. There is very little about the life of the 'ordinary' nineteenth century Zulu.

Nevertheless, it can only be said that these sorts of problems are outweighed by the attempt Laband has made to create a coherent narrative, faithful to reality (p. xi). *Rope of Sand* is well written and well researched and accordingly the contribution it makes to KwaZulu Natal's history in the nineteenth century is considerable.

The Construction of Afrikaner Nationalist Identity

Constructs of Identity and Difference in South African Literature

by Johan van Wyk

Durban-Westville: CSSALL, 1995, 122 pp.

ISBN 0 947445 26 9

Reviewed by H.J. Vermeulen

Department Afrikaans & Nederlands

University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg)

In this first number of the CSSALL's 'Re-thinking South African Literature Series' the focus of Johan van Wyk is mainly on the construction of Afrikaner nationalist identity by means of some early Afrikaans texts. His 're-thinking' of these texts is done in terms of some constructs borrowed